



*A biographical sketch of the
late William George Maton, M. D.*

John Ayrton Paris



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Yours faithfully
W. H. Mason

A
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

OF THE LATE

WILLIAM GEORGE MATON, M.D.

FELLOW OF THE ROYAL AND ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETIES,
VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE LINNEAN SOCIETY,
AND FELLOW OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS.

READ AT AN EVENING MEETING OF THE
COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS.

BY

JOHN AYRTON PARIS, M.D. F.R.S.

FELLOW OF THE COLLEGE.

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A

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

OF THE LATE

WILLIAM GEORGE MATON, M.D.

WILLIAM GEORGE MATON was born at Salisbury on the 31st of January, 1774. His father, George, was a wine-merchant of considerable repute in that city, and having served the highest municipal office, was usually addressed as "Mr. Chamberlain Maton:" although far from affluent, he bestowed a liberal education upon his children. The subject of the present memoir was the eldest of *four*, all of whom he survived. His elementary education was obtained at the Free Grammar School of his native place, and it also appears that he was early initiated in the rudiments of Natural History, since a passion for scientific pursuits, even while a schoolboy, soon displayed itself, and is said to have considerably interfered with the progress of his more legitimate

studies. This predilection was much strengthened by several concurring circumstances. He had not attained his tenth year, when it was his good fortune to have attracted the notice and fostering regard of the Reverend Thomas Rackett of Spe-tisbury, a gentleman too well known in the circles of scientific and literary distinction to require from me any further notice than an expression of acknowledgement and thanks for much of the valuable information which is contained in the present memoir. Some time afterwards he formed an acquaintance with that distinguished chemist and philosopher, Mr. Charles Hatchett, which, in the progress of time, ripened into a friendship that terminated only in the grave. The former of these gentlemen introduced his young friend to Dr. Richard Pulteney of Blandford, a physician of considerable eminence in the West of England, and the learned author of various works on Natural History, and, more especially, of one entitled "*A General View of the Writings of Linnæus.*"

In July, 1790, he was admitted at Queen's College, Oxford, as a commoner, and shortly afterwards he added to his scientific acquaintance Mr. Aylmer Bourke Lambert, a prominent name in the annals of botany, and Dr. John Sibthorp, Professor of Botany, and author of the "*Flora*

Oxoniensis" and "*Flora Græca*." It is fair to conclude that the constant and intimate intercourse which he enjoyed with these distinguished persons had a material influence in moulding his mind, and in inspiring it with a generous and noble emulation; indeed, we learn that in the preparation of both the works of Dr. Sibthorp, MATON was a zealous assistant. During the composition of the "*Flora Oxoniensis*," he attended the Professor in his herbarizing excursions; and although, from motives of prudence, he resisted tempting solicitations to accompany him to Greece, he nevertheless corresponded with him on subjects connected with the scientific objects of his travels. With the other eminent persons above-mentioned we shall hereafter find that he not only continued through life to cherish a warm friendship, but that his name has become honourably associated with theirs in the history of science; and, let me here observe, that although botany, to borrow the metaphor of Lord Bacon, was to him as "a first-born child, yet he did not make it his heir, to the exclusion of every other;" indeed, I have reasons for believing that, had he not been influenced by professional considerations, the study of conchology would have enjoyed a preference.

During the Oxford vacations he generally

visited London, for the purpose of mixing with the society of scientific men, and of attending the meetings of philosophical bodies.

It was on the 18th of March, 1794, when only in his twenty-first year, that he was elected a Fellow of the Linnean Society, which had the effect of introducing him to a wider circle of naturalists, all bound together by a common attachment to that distinguished botanist and most amiable man Sir James Edward Smith. We have only to search the Transactions of that learned body, to discover ample evidence of the zeal and industry with which MATON laboured to advance the progress of his favourite science. In the third volume, we shall find a paper, read before the society in 1794, describing a new species of *Tellina*, not noticed by Linnæus; the shell was found on chalky parts of the bed of the river Avon, and in rivulets communicating with it near Salisbury, and hence he gave it the name of *Tellina rivalis*. In the fifth volume of the same work is a paper entitled "*Observations on the Orcheston Long Grass*." The object of this communication was to prove that the long grass of this celebrated meadow of Orcheston Saint Mary is not only not a species peculiar to the spot, as botanists had asserted, but that it is composed of most of the species which grow in other meadows,

the luxuriance being favoured by the operation of several local causes. In the seventh volume, we are presented with a joint paper by MATON and his early friend Mr. Rackett, entitled "*An Historical Account of Testaceological Writers*," which occupies no less than 125 quarto pages of the Transactions, including a history of the most important labourers in this province of natural history, from Aristotle to the most modern writer. On this occasion, MATON pays a just tribute to the admirable researches of his friend Mr. Hatchett. He distinguishes him as being the only author, with whose writings we are acquainted, who has scientifically investigated the chemical character of shells, a comparison of which with those derived from external structure cannot but be highly curious and interesting to the philosophical naturalist. To the disciple of Linnæus, it is peculiarly satisfactory to perceive that so many of Mr. Hatchett's experiments tend to establish the propriety of distinctions adopted by that illustrious naturalist. "We need only," says MATON, "refer to the instance of the *Echinus*, the chemical characteristic of which genus proves, in opposition to Klein, the correctness of Linnæus in placing it among the *crustaceous* instead of the testaceous tribe; for the presence of the *phosphate of lime*, as detected

by Mr. Hatchett in the covering of the *Echinus*, at once distinguishes the latter from *testaceous* bodies, which alone consist of *carbonate of lime*, mixed with gelatinous matter." It is with great satisfaction that I allude to this passage in the memoir, not only as furnishing a most beautiful example of the intimate connection that subsists between all the various branches of natural knowledge, by which one science, however distinct and apparently unconnected, can be thus made to shed a reflected lustre on others; but because I feel that, in our rapid progress along the stream of discovery, we are too apt to overlook the services of those who first set our bark afloat; I therefore rejoice in this opportunity of recalling to the recollection of my scientific brethren the early services of Mr. Hatchett in a new and unexplored region of philosophy. This paper is succeeded by another, equally elaborate and important, by the same author, being "*A Descriptive Catalogue of the British Testacea*," and containing an account of some remarkable shells found in cavities of a calcareous stone, called by the stonemasons "*Plymouth Rag*." In the tenth volume of the Transactions, MATON has described seven new species of *Testacea* from Rio de Plata, which had been placed in his hands by Sir Joseph Banks. In the same volume we shall find a learned cri-

tical and botanical note, appended by him to a paper on the *Cardamom* by Mr. White, surgeon, of Bombay, in which he designated the genus of which it consists *Elettaria*, a nomenclature to which Sir James Edward Smith objected, and proposed that of *Matonia*; a suggestion which was adopted by Mr. Roscoe in his description of the "*Scitamineæ*:" this, however, has been since superseded, on the authority of Roxburgh, by that of "*Alpinia Cardamomum*."

The Linnean Society, as it would appear, duly appreciated the value of his services; his name was in the list submitted to the Crown for insertion in the charter granted to that body in 1802. He was annually re-elected into the Council, the President as repeatedly nominating him to the office of Vice-President. It ought also to be stated that the Linnean club acknowledges Dr. MATON as its founder and most constant attendant.

From the limited number, as well as the retired habits, of the true votaries of this elegant science, the researches of MATON can never become the objects of popular admiration, nor will they attract the regard of those who are engaged in the busy pursuits of life; but his kindred labourers have inscribed his name in a

temple where his spirit best loved to dwell, not amidst the tumultuous intercourse of men, but in the deep and sequestered recesses of nature. Here will his memory be cherished in unostentatious simplicity, when the gorgeous monument and the storied urn shall have crumbled into dust; for although the memorial of the naturalist may be limited as to the extent of its publicity, it at least receives a compensation in the durability of its existence. Augustus Cæsar raised a statue to his physician Musa; Juba, King of Libya, evinced his gratitude for similar services by naming a plant after Euphorbus (*Euphorbia*), "*Ubi jam Musæ statua? Periit—evanuit! Euphorbii autem nomen perdurat—perennat.*"

By various members of the Linnean Society has the name of MATON been identified with objects of natural history; for instance, it has been given to a species of *Tellina* in Wood's *Index Testaceologicus*; to a genus of plants by Sir James Edward Smith, and afterwards by his friend Robert Brown in the *Plantæ Asiaticæ Rariores* of Dr. Wallich; and to a new species of *Psittacus* by Mr. Vigors and Dr. Horsfield, in their description of the Australian birds in the collection of the Linnean Society, and which is thus announced: "*In honorem GULIELMI MATON,*

Medicinæ Doctoris, Societatis Linneanæ PRO-PRÆSIDIS, in Zoologia eximii judicis, hæc species pulchra generis pulcherrimi nomine distinguatur."

It would appear that, in the earlier part of MATON'S life, his attention had been attracted to vegetable chemistry, as the means of occasionally confirming the distinctions of the naturalist, upon the same principle that the researches of Hatchett had become subservient to the views of the conchologist; and it is not a little remarkable that, in the prosecution of such an inquiry, he should have actually discovered the alkaloid principle of bark. By referring to the fifth volume of the London Medical and Physical Journal (p. 33), we shall find an account of the experiments, and of the precipitate occasioned by an infusion of nut-galls in the decoctions of bark; a fact which occasioned considerable speculation at the time, and which ultimately led to the detection of the active principle of that heroic remedy.

It would have been extraordinary had not the active mind of MATON been early attracted to those venerable remains of antiquity which give so romantic an interest to the vicinity of his native city; hence, having acquired a taste for antiquarian researches, he united their pursuit with the investigations of natural history. Nor are these studies, however dissimilar they may

appear on a superficial view of their tendency, so far incompatible with each other as to require for their successful investigation minds of a different order and construction. On the contrary, the mouldering monuments of past ages, and the fresh and fragrant flower expanding its petals to the sun, although furnishing images of beautiful and vivid contrast, are connected, in the imagination of the philosopher, by trains of thought leading to the most interesting and profound reflections. We accordingly find MATON employing much of his leisure from severer studies in attempting to elucidate the history of Salisbury, by rescuing from oblivion the scattered records of the taste and feeling of former times. In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1792, he has given an account of a conventual seal found at Salisbury. He also contributed largely to the "*Salisbury Guide*," and to "*Hutchins's History of Dorset*." He happens to have been the first person to whose lot it had fallen to record any facts connected with the history of the mysterious monument of Stonehenge; having described, in the thirteenth volume of the *Archæologia*, the circumstances attending the dilapidation which took place in 1794, and ascertained the weight and composition of one of its largest stones; by which he was enabled to settle a point that had occasioned con-

siderable speculation and controversy. In the same year in which this paper was published, the Society of Antiquaries received him into their body at the age of 23, and repeatedly elected him into their Council. He also became early a Fellow of the Royal Society, and his name appears in the certificate as one of those who proposed Sir Humphry Davy for that honour.

I shall now record a circumstance of some interest that occurred in the year 1793. Dr. MATON, while resident in Oxford, established a small society for the advantage of scientific and literary discussion. The heads of houses, however, denounced this learned confederacy as a dangerous encroachment upon the statutes, and, although all political questions were expressly excluded by their laws, they were not allowed to hold their meetings in any public room. The society was subsequently remodelled, and transferred to the more congenial soil of the metropolis, under the name of the "ACADEMICAL SOCIETY;" its founder, Dr. MATON, having for several successive years been elected as President. The majority, however, of the new members being students in law, it became subservient to the cultivation of oratorical talent, and the original members ultimately seceded; among whom were Sir John Stoddart, President of the Supreme Tribunal of Justice at

Malta; Lord Moncrieff, one of the Lords of Session in Scotland; Dr. Copleston, the learned Bishop of Llandaff; and Dr. Dibdin, the bibliographer. To these acceded, when the society was re-established in London, the present Right Hon. Lord Glenelg and Robert Grant; Sir Launcelot Shadwell, the Vice-Chancellor of England; Sir Benjamin Brodie, Bart.; Sir Henry Ellis, the learned Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries; Mr. Justice Williams; Sir John Campbell, the present Attorney-General; Mr. Serjeant Storkes; the late Mr. Bowdler; Lord Gifford; Dr. Reeve, and Dr. Bateman. Amongst the frequent visitors who took part in the discussions, were Lord Brougham and the present Lord Advocate of Scotland.

In the summer of 1794, Mr. Hatchett and Mr. Rackett, having arranged to make a tour into Cornwall, invited their young friend MATON to accompany them. An opportunity of thus gratifying his spirit of inquiry, and, more particularly, of pursuing the studies of mineralogy and geology, held out a prospect of intellectual pleasure that was irresistible. Mr. Hatchett, as we so well know, was the first chemist and mineralogist of the day; Mr. Rackett was not only a distinguished naturalist, but a zealous and enlightened antiquary. With such able companions, it would indeed have been extraordinary had not MATON

realized all the advantages his most sanguine hopes could have anticipated ; and let it be remembered that, at this period, neither the mineralogical productions, nor the geological structure of that important district of our empire had received any remarkable attention. The spirit of Davy had not summoned from the dark recesses of its mines and caverns those genii which have latterly displayed the extent and variety of their subterranean treasures. Upon this subject I feel that I am competent to offer an opinion ; and I assert, without the fear of contradiction, that MATON was the first scientific labourer in that extensive field of mineral riches. During his tour he entered in his journal every phenomenon connected with the mineralogy, geology, antiquities, and natural history of the districts he visited, while his friend Mr. Rackett was occupied in representing the more striking beauties of the scenery by a series of masterly sketches. On the termination of this tour, which included considerable portions of the counties of Dorset, Devon, and Somerset, besides Cornwall, which may be said to have been its more immediate object of attraction, Dr. MATON found that he had collected such a mass of interesting and novel information as to sanction the publication of a distinct work. The memoranda, however, were

first submitted to Sir Joseph Banks, who most strenuously supported him in his laudable design, while his friend Mr. Rackett placed at his disposal such drawings as might be considered necessary for its illustration. To enter into an analysis of this elegant production of the early years of my lamented friend, would carry me far beyond the bounds to which I am necessarily limited. The antiquary, the geologist, the mineralogist, the conchologist, and the historian may each derive satisfaction and instruction from its pages. I must not, however, dismiss the subject without remarking, that the work is accompanied by a plan, so ingeniously engraved, as to represent the various rocks and sub-soils of which the country consists; and, let me add, that this was the first attempt in England to construct a GEOLOGICAL MAP.

Dr. MATON was originally intended for the clerical profession; and, in truth, from the natural timidity and reserve of his disposition—from his romantic delight in the luxuries of retirement, and in the charms of a country life, it is a question whether such was not the path, had he consulted his individual happiness, which he ought to have pursued; he seems, however, somewhat hastily to have abandoned his original intention. All his favourite studies connected themselves with the science of medicine, and the influence of his

friend Dr. Pulteney, to whom he had now leisure to make more extended visits, without doubt, fostered his growing attachment to it. Having, therefore, obtained the concurrence of his father, he commenced his medical studies in the spring of 1797, by entering himself as a pupil at the Westminster Hospital, and to various lecturers. Dr. Baillie was at that time the most distinguished anatomical teacher in the western part of the metropolis, with whom was associated the ingenious Mr. Cruickshank. On the admirable lectures of these eminent persons he was a constant and diligent attendant, and with the former an intimacy arose which continued to the end of the life of that most exemplary man and distinguished physician. It was chiefly from the encouragement and advice of Baillie that he acquired the firmness and perseverance which enabled him to encounter the difficulties, and to sustain the exertions, during the early years of his professional career. To his sound counsels, and to his pure example, he was deeply indebted for the due regulation of his conduct as a member of an enlightened profession and as a man of the world. Having thus accomplished himself in all the collateral branches of medical science, and been initiated in the practice of physic by a sedulous attention to the phænomena of disease in the

hospitals of the metropolis, he commenced the actual practice of his profession in the year 1800, having been previously admitted to the degree of bachelor in medicine. In 1801 he proceeded to the doctorate, and was in due course elected into the fellowship of the college; and confidently may I appeal to his brethren, whether, in all its social relations, its high professional duties, and in its most sacred obligations, he did not acquit himself with zeal, talent, firmness, and integrity. He discharged, *seriatim*, all the offices which, as Fellow of the College, he was called upon to perform, as Gulstonian Lecturer, Harveian Orator, Censor, and Treasurer, and lastly as an Elect. Nor must we pass over the essential services he rendered the College and the profession by his assistance in arranging the nomenclature of the botanical and zoological articles of the *Materia Medica* in three successive editions of the *Pharmacopœia*. To the Transactions of the College, he was also a contributor. In the fourth volume he has a communication on the obscure subject of *Superfætation*. In the fifth are two papers; the one entitled "*Some Account of a Rash liable to be mistaken for Scarlatina*;" the other relates a case of Chorea in an aged person, cured by musk.

Very shortly after he had attained the Doctor's degree, he was unanimously elected physician to

the Westminster Hospital, on the resignation of Dr., now Sir Alexander, Crichton. This to so young a practitioner was an appointment of great importance ; but, early as his professional career commenced, we may conclude that before the period alluded to, his acquirements were duly appreciated by his contemporaries, for after reading and defending a paper upon *Chorea*, we find him seated as one of the Presidents of the "Lyceum Medicum," a society established by John Hunter, and which was at that time the popular arena for medical discussion. The first few years, however, of his practice were, as may well be supposed, all but unproductive; and his pecuniary resources being inadequate to sustain a long state of expectancy, he was advised to adopt a system, not unusual with the young metropolitan physician, that of residing at some popular watering-place during the season. Weymouth was suggested to him as a place well calculated to respond to his wishes; and as this important period of his life is marked by circumstances of considerable interest, I have endeavoured to collect the most authentic particulars relating to it. From Robert Benson, Esq., of Lincoln's Inn, I have derived the following statement: "My father," says he, "who knew MATON from his infancy, and always expressed a

high degree of interest in his professional success, accompanied him in his first journey to Weymouth. Having at that time little or no practice, MATON had ample leisure to pursue his botanical researches, and such was the zeal and diligence which characterized his pursuit, that his rambles about Weymouth attracted very general notice. Their Majesties, it will be remembered, were passing the season at Gloucester Lodge, and one of the Princesses amused herself with botany. It so happened that a plant was brought to the Royal student, not uncommon in the neighbourhood, but which was unknown to Her Royal Highness; it was the *Arundo Epigejos*. Dr. MATON was mentioned to the Queen as a person likely to solve the difficulty; and as my father," continues Mr. Benson, "was accidentally strolling with MATON along the Esplanade, an equery of Her Majesty came from the Lodge, and addressing himself to the former, informed him that Her Majesty desired to see him. My father was, as may be readily imagined, not a little astonished at this announcement; and the equery, perceiving, no doubt, some hesitation in his manner, inquired whether he was not addressing Dr. MATON. The mistake was at once explained, and the Doctor accompanied his conductor to the Presence. Such was the origin of his introduction to the Royal

Family, to which he was unquestionably much indebted for his early advancement to profitable practice. It gave him a name and character at Weymouth highly advantageous to his professional views; and the manner in which George the Third subsequently mentioned his talents and acquirements, at once secured for the young physician the confidence of all the courtly invalids who required the aid of superior advice; and it led, in 1816, to his appointment as Physician Extraordinary to the person of Her Majesty, Queen Charlotte. The Duke of Kent having been attacked with a serious illness in Devonshire in 1820, it was thought advisable to call into consultation a London physician, and Dr. MATON was selected upon this responsible occasion; and, although his efforts, in conjunction with those of the domestic physician, failed in saving the life of the illustrious Duke, still his zeal and attention were duly appreciated, and served to cement his connection with the different branches of the Royal Family; and Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent, without any solicitation on his part, appointed him Physician in Ordinary to herself, and to her Royal infant the Princess Victoria; and to the hour of his death he was regarded, not only as the confidential physician, but as the private friend, and the arbiter of all

scientific questions of interest which presented themselves to the notice of that Royal circle."

I must now carry you back to the year 1805, an important æra in the scientific life of MATON. His early acquaintance with Dr. Pulteney, and the more mature friendship in which they were united, have been already mentioned. On the death of this distinguished naturalist, MATON, to whom he had bequeathed all his botanical manuscripts, conceived the plan of editing his "*General View of the Writings of Linnæus*," and of prefixing a biographical memoir of its departed author, "whose well-merited eminence," says he, "both as an author and as a physician, seemed likely to render it acceptable to the public; while," he adds, that "he felt an additional motive to pay this tribute to his memory, in the grateful remembrance of a friendship which influenced his pursuits at a very youthful period, and to which he was indebted for many of the most instructive and agreeable hours of his life." In the execution of this work, accident put him in possession of some documents, which not only contributed to enhance its value, but to bestow upon it the claims of originality. These consisted of a diary of Linnæus, written by himself, and which was now for the first time translated into English from the Swedish manuscript.

I have now to record another work, or rather an appendix to that which Dr. MATON designates as one of the most superb offerings at the altar of Flora ever made by a private individual, Mr. Lambert's "*Description of the Genus Pinus*;" to which MATON contributed "An Account of the Medicinal and other Uses of various Substances prepared from Trees of that Genus." These products, both native and artificial, are much employed in medicine and the arts; and the terms commonly attached to them are, in general, extremely vague, ambiguous, and inexpressive. In this appendix, it is the author's object to dissipate the confusion, by substituting appropriate appellations for those which are either ambiguous or likely to lead to error, and by immediately arranging under every head such synonyms as may be adduced without undue latitude of conjecture.

In the year 1809 his private practice had become so extensive, that he found it necessary to retire from the office of physician to the Westminster Hospital, and, through his kind recommendation and patronage, I had the good fortune to succeed him in that important situation. During the latter fifteen years of his life, the reputation he had acquired brought with it such a pressure of professional labour, that it became absolutely necessary for the preservation of his

health that he should devote several weeks of the autumn to relaxation and a total abstraction from business. These brief, but bright intervals were employed in visiting the interesting districts of his own country, as well as various parts of the continent of Europe. France, Switzerland, Germany, Venice, Rome, Naples, and the Pyrenees successively afforded him objects of novel inquiry and of philosophical contemplation; and were I not limited by time and space, I might select from his various letters such passages as would not only indicate the elevated delight he derived from these tours, but exhibit him as an animated and most engaging correspondent.

The person of Dr. MATON is too well known to this audience to require any description; I shall therefore merely relate an anecdote, communicated to me by Mr. Rackett. He states that the secretary to the late Pretender Charles Edward, Mr. Lumsden, once observed to Dr. MATON at a dinner party, that he could not keep his eyes from him, so strongly did he resemble his master when in the prime of life.

In private life, no man in his intercourse with society was more agreeable in his manners, or more sincere and steady in his friendships—no one more charitable and benevolent in his disposition: his notion of honour was refined to the

extent of chivalry ; his affection for his relatives and kindred unbounded, and his generosity towards them was only exceeded by the high sense of integrity which occasionally led him to exercise it. In short, I know not whether it is my admiration and esteem of his character, the remembrance of an uninterrupted friendship of thirty years, and the grief I experience for his loss,—I know not whether these circumstances have bribed my heart and blinded my judgement ; but I cannot contemplate the assemblage of virtues in my departed friend, without regarding him as having approached almost as nearly to perfection as the frailties of our nature can allow. Nor should I do his memory full justice were I to pass unnoticed a noble act of beneficence, alike uncommon in the extent of the sacrifices it demanded and in the circumstances which induced it. The motive was unconnected with any selfish gratification, anticipated recompense, or prospective advantage ; it was the sole offspring of a love of justice, a stern determination to sustain what is right, at any sacrifice of personal comfort or even of worldly prudence. On the death of his father, in the year 1816, the latter years of whose life had been embittered by protracted bodily suffering, which had the effect of throwing all his accounts into confusion and arrear, a large unex-

plained balance was found due from his estate, after applying all his available assets. Thus MARTON, instead of inheriting considerable property, as he had every right to expect, and which, on the threshold as he then was of his profession, would have been most important to him, unexpectedly found himself called upon to administer an insolvent estate, and to provide for his collateral relatives who had depended upon his father for support, or who had, in the declining age of both his parents, afforded them the necessary attentions and comfort. His resolution was immediately formed ; he prevailed upon every creditor to accept his debt by instalments ; and, in order that he might faithfully redeem the pledge he had given to them, he annually set apart such a portion of his income as he could spare, after defraying the expenses which were essential to his professional station and appearance. At length he achieved his noble object ; he liquidated the debts of his father, and he provided for those who were dependent upon him ; but it was through long toil, anxiety, and a secret depression that weighed on his sensitive mind that he accomplished it. I am informed that a sum exceeding 20,000*l.* was for these purposes expended during his life ; and thus were the means by which large fortunes are generally created—regu-

lar accumulations upon early savings—devoted to purposes far more sacred, and more gratifying to a mind, actuated at all times by a moral feeling, devoid of every selfish and sordid alloy.

It would have been “passing strange” had not the citizens of his native place justly and gratefully appreciated so noble an act of honourable disinterestedness; and they accordingly recorded their sense of his character by a civic memorial. The mayor and corporation presented him with the freedom of the city, in a splendid gold box, bearing the following inscription :

THE MAYOR
AND COMMONALTY OF NEW SARUM,
TO
WILLIAM GEORGE MATON, M.D.,
F.R.S., F.L.S., F.A.S.,
WITH THE FREEDOM OF HIS NATIVE CITY,
TO MARK THEIR ESTEEM FOR HIS TALENTS AND CHARACTER.
1827.

Dr. MATON had, through life, anticipated with much pleasure the period at which he might rest from his professional labours, and retire into the depths of the country to indulge in his favourite pursuits. About a year before his death he had so far advanced his projected plan, as to become the purchaser of Redlynch House, near Downton,

in Wiltshire, where he spent some time during the autumn. Upon this occasion a circumstance occurred, as if his presiding genius had contrived to pamper his ruling passion, and heighten the joy of his anticipations. He discovered growing near his domain the *Asarum Europæum*, one of our rarest British plants. On his return to town, he frequently spoke to me of the pleasure and satisfaction he had received from his autumnal retreat, and expressed his determination to indulge in that retirement every succeeding season. It also appears that he had arranged some plans which were to afford him some agreeable occupation during these intervals of relaxation from the severer duties of his profession. From a letter which I have received from Mr. Benson, it would appear that his taste for antiquarian researches, which so greatly distinguished the period of his youth, had revived during his declining days, for he informs me that he had undertaken to collect materials for Sir Richard Hoare respecting the history of Salisbury and its vicinity; and that Dr. MATON had assisted him by the production of notes made in early life, from which he had obtained a complete catalogue of the plants indigenous to a circular area of twelve miles in extent round that city. By the same authority I am informed that in 1831 Dr. MATON suggested the formation

of a Society to consist of Wiltshire topographers, each of whom was to take up a different station in the county during the autumn, with a view to examine, personally, the various objects of interest in each district. The plan, however, was never carried into execution. Mr. Benson was consigned to the bed of sickness; MATON terminated his career in the grave.

The precarious tenure of our existence, and the vanity of human wishes, suggest a sentiment so trite, and so destitute of grace and novelty, as to expose the writer who would venture to moralize upon its tendency to the charge of a commonplace declaimer. There is, however, something so striking and instructive in all the circumstances by which it is exemplified in the instance before us, that I cannot pass it over without a comment. To how many of us assembled here may it not furnish a salutary lesson!—to all, if properly considered, it will operate as the means of extinguishing the thirst of avarice, of assuaging the fervour of ambition, of moderating the too eager aspirations of hope, and of soothing the bitterness of disappointment. Six months had scarcely elapsed, before MATON, who had been thus exhilarated by the prospects of happiness, and engaged in maturing plans for years of intellectual enjoyment, is abruptly removed from the bright scenes of

his anticipation by an unexpected and painful death.

It is true that his malady had been stealing upon him for several years, but so gradual had been its invasion as to have been almost imperceptible to himself, so that the rapidity with which it progressed during the last few weeks, gave to its termination all the afflicting characters of an unexpected and sudden death. He died at his house in Spring Gardens on the 30th of March, 1835.

Notwithstanding the length to which this memoir has been extended, I trust it will not be necessary for me to offer any apology for the time I have occupied or the attention I have solicited. Let it be remembered, that the very object of these evening meetings of the College is to draw together the different members of our profession, not only for instruction, but with a view to encourage a sentiment of mutual good-will and kindly feeling,—to soften existing asperities by quiet collision and friendly intercourse,—and, in the language of Sterne, “to teach the milk of human kindness to flow all cheerily in gentle and uninterrupted channels,” so that we may, one and all, cordially unite for the common purpose

of raising the standard of our moral and social qualities. In pursuance of such an end, let me ask, whether a subject can be found better calculated to attain our object than a memoir of the accomplished physician and excellent man whom I have attempted to delineate? The very contemplation of such a character soothes every turbulent feeling, and harmonizes within us those elements which might otherwise be discordant, and, by putting us in better humour with ourselves and with our profession, it must incline us to entertain a kinder regard for the intentions of each other. Nor is the worldly success and temporal reward which crowned the career of MATON without its moral. It has too generally been asserted, that the predilection which the public have evinced for particular physicians can rarely be traced to any acknowledged principle connected with the possession of substantial merit, or with the honourable exercise of superior talent. It must, however, be acknowledged, that the instance of Dr. MATON, amongst many others recorded in the annals of our College, offers a striking refutation of so humiliating a proposition. No one more anxiously desired to divest his profession of every selfish and sordid consideration: he had early enlisted himself under the banners of truth, and sooner would he have forfeited

every chance of promotion than have rested his hopes of success on an unholy alliance with the spirit of delusion. It is true that he treated the prejudices of his patients with indulgence and regard, but his professional advancement was never marked by a mean submission or a servile attention to their wishes, nor by an abject homage to their rank or opulence. He won their confidence by a distinguishing sagacity and a prompt judgement, manifested in a manner at once decisive, but unaffectedly courteous and engaging. He maintained this advantage by the success of his treatment, and by the warm and active diligence with which he directed it.

THE END.

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